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**Testimony for SB 24 Section 35: An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness**

The following comments are in support of funding for Section 35 of SB 24. I would like to thank Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischman, and members of the Education Committee for this opportunity to share my thoughts regarding SB 24, in particular Section 35. My name is LuAnn Gallicchio. I am the Director of Adult and Early Childhood Education for Hamden Public Schools. During the past 34 years I have worked with many staff and hundreds of families who have been affected by the items found in Section 35 of this bill.

I would like to begin with the staff and administrators. Early care and education teachers across the state are hardworking dedicated people whose primary goal is to provide a quality program in a safe and nurturing environment for every child in their classroom. These individuals are no different than any other group of Connecticut's workers in that they require appropriate training to do their job well and they need a living wage so as not to take on another job or two to pay their household bills. Well trained staff provides quality programming which all of Connecticut's children deserve. Advocating for the creation of a coordinated and comprehensive state-wide system of professional development for early care and education staff and resources to increase salaries in all communities is something that I stand behind.

For many families accessing early care and education programs is like making your way through a long and complicated maze. Families need information to help them understand what quality classrooms look and feel like so they can make informed decisions when choosing an early care and education program for their child. They need assistance obtaining information regarding physical and mental health care, library services, adult education, and counseling to name a few. Often time families require assistance in areas not generally considered those provided through an early care and education program. This is why connections to community resources like Family Resource Centers become imperative. If we're looking for successes within the preschool population early care and education programs need to belong to a comprehensive system that allows them the ability to meet the needs of the "whole child" as well as the entire family unit. Funding toward creating a comprehensive system that would allow this to happen is also something that I stand behind.

I would, however, like to caution against an overly bureaucratic process when designing the "system". It must be flexible, meeting the needs of all families incorporating a diverse service delivery. The combination of public and private programs adds to the complexity of the system as well as the fact that the birth – 5 population is different from and requires different services than the traditional K-12 educational system and thus requires a different skill set.

In closing I would also like to mention that there are families in need of affordable quality early care and education programs in communities across Connecticut. We must continue to work at increasing the number of these slots for all of Connecticut's children where the need exists and not only in priority school districts.